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ANNUAL REPORT.

THE past year has been an encouraging one both for the Society and for all American students of Dante. If the signs are to be trusted, a continually increasing number of persons among us is drawn to the serious reading of the poet, while to meet the needs of these students, larger and larger numbers of books and essays are published both in the United States and England. To be sure, many of these publications show the good will, rather than the sound judgment, of their authors; yet the very frequency of their appearance may be looked upon as a promise of real and valuable gains to Dante studies in the future. Dante is not a poet to be harmed by the clumsy and ignorant homage of the incompetent, for all homage of him must proceed from what is sound and serious even in these. At the same time, the earnest student of the poet and his works cannot but feel the need of striving as much as possible for the diffusion of a truly scholarly knowledge of him and of them. This is the purpose the Dante Society has had from its foundation, and this still

remains its sincerest interest. It urges upon all who love Dante and desire to see his influence strong in the intellectual and spiritual life of the modern world, the necessity of genuine devotion to truth and sound learning in the study of him. It aims to foster, in so far as it can, this spirit in those who give themselves to the long but profitable task of learning to understand his works. By its own publications, and by the encouragement and help it may be able to give those who can make real contributions to such studies, it strives to aid in enlarging year by year the bounds of our knowledge; and in all legitimate ways it endeavors to extend and deepen the interest which serious-minded persons must always feel in Dante, as soon as they obtain any acquaintance with him.

It is certainly a reason for hopefulness that these efforts of the Society appear to have obtained a fair measure of success. Among the indications of this are the slow but steady increase in the number of members, and the greater demand for the Society's publications that shows itself from year to year. A further sign is the cordial spirit shown by European scholars toward the Society's undertakings.

This recognition, however, brings with it responsibilities. The Council has for several years foreseen that greater expenditures would be necessary in the near future. Thus the demand for the Society's Reports has been so great that it is no longer possible to

furnish purchasers with complete sets. Naturally, too, the most interesting and valuable Reports are those that have been soonest exhausted. The Council feels that it ought to take steps before long to reprint at least the scholarly portion of these Reports. The Council, furthermore, still cherishes the hope that has been expressed in the last two Reports, of being able to undertake more freely the publication of valuable contributions to the study of Dante. But these projects imply the use of considerable sums of money, which can be obtained only from an increase of membership. In view of these facts the Council has decided to issue at the same time with this Report an appeal to members and to other persons interested in the study of the poet, inviting coöperation in an extension of the Society's work.

The Report is accompanied this year by a study, historical and bibliographical, of Dante in America, contributed by a member of the Society, Mr. Theodore W. Koch. This is the paper which it had been hoped to print in the Fourteenth Annual Report, but which the author was unable to finish in time. The delay has, however, enabled Mr. Koch to add materially to the value of his work. Owing to the extent of this essay the regular list of additions to the Dante Collection in the Harvard University Library will be omitted for the present year. The Librarian of the Society, Mr. Lane, expects, however, to publish in the next Report

a complete list of the accessions for the two years from 1895 to 1897. The Society desires to express its gratitude both to authors and to other benefactors who are constantly manifesting their interest and sympathy by contributions of books and articles upon Dante.

ARTHUR RICHMOND MARSH, *Secretary.*

For the Council of the Dante Society.